

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

Universal Paint Shield

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

Not applicable

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

Not applicable

INCORPORATION-BY-REFERENCE OF MATERIAL SUBMITTED ON A COMPACT DISC

Not applicable

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to devices for covering wall electrical outlets and switches, and more particularly to a universal paint shield for temporarily covering electrical switches and outlets to prevent paint from contact therewith during wall and ceiling painting operations.

Description of Related Art

During painting operations of the interior of a building or home, it is typically the case that such painting operations which may be quickly done by using either spray equipment or paint roller applications. It is the preparation time of covering all non-painted surfaces associated with the walls that substantially adds to the overall painting project time.

One aspect of this preparation work is the prevention of inadvertently painting or splattering the wall electrical outlet assemblies including cover plates, electrical switches

and outlets. In the past, in addition to the removal of all such cover plates for electrical outlet and switch assemblies, the remaining exposed components thereof, including the outlet receptacles and switches, must also have been protectively masked off with the use of tape.

More recently, a number of prior art devices have been patented which provide thin molded paint shields for electrical switches and outlets which are adapted in various ways to be releasably attachable to cover all or portions of a particular electrical assembly and associated cover plate and exposed components thereof. Following is a list of known prior art devices which represent a significant effort at time reduction and painting efficiency, but which fail to disclose a universal design:

D185,531 to Carlson

D279,860 to Schwalbe

D297,396 to Schwalbe

D349,836 to Maggard

D364,849 to De Waal

D425,768 to Staley

3,386,071 to Allen

4,234,774 to Paparella

4,660,912 to Tomek

5,003,128 to Grondin

5,063,872 to Maus et al.

5,285,014 to Gilchrist

5,723,816 to Neece

6,103,974 to Erdfarb

6,165,269 to Kathe

6,317,995 to Hoffmann, Sr.

However, none of these prior art devices appear to provide a universal paint shield which is adapted to be easily installable onto virtually all types and sizes of electrical switches and outlets of a given standard size and their associated cover plates and exposed components thereof. For example, Neece in U.S. Patent 5,732,816 provides a paint shield for electrical switches in one embodiment thereof while providing in another embodiment a device which includes prongs which are insertable into the apertures of an electrical wall outlet. In U.S. Patent 5,285,014, Gilchrist also teaches two embodiments of the invention in order to deal with electrical switch assemblies and separately electrical wall outlets each of which require protection during painting operations.

The present invention provides a universal paint shield for the easy and convenient protection of virtually all electrical wall switches and outlets and the associated cover plates and exposed components thereof. This paint shield is easily attachable over and biasingly secured to the cover plate of such electrical assemblies and provides an offset central portion for the front panel of the device which forms a clearance cavity adapted in size and volume to enclose virtually all features of electrical switches and outlets without interference as this device does not depend upon the functional components of electrical switches and outlets for its releasable support therefrom. Rather, the uniquely inwardly curved opposing edge portions of either the top and bottom walls or side walls, or both, biasingly engage the corresponding outer edges of the cover plate to effect releasable

retention of the device thereover during painting operations without the need for any disassembly or taping.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention is directed to a universal paint shield for releasable attachment to an electrical wall outlet or switch assembly for preventing paint from contacting any exposed surfaces thereof as the wall is painted. The paint shield has a molded plastic body formed as a unit having a front panel and top, bottom and side walls projecting rearward of the front panel and having substantially continuous outer edge portions. At least two opposing edge portions biasingly engage against the corresponding outer edge surfaces of the cover plate to entirely cover all surfaces of the cover plate and assembly. Top, bottom and side walls resiliently cooperate with edge portions which have concaved or arcuately inwardly contoured longitudinal edges to require that the edge sections, slightly smaller than the cover plate, be force fitted over the corresponding outer edge surfaces of the cover plate. The front panel preferably includes a forwardly extending offset central portion which defines an enlarged clearance cavity adapted to provide clearance for substantially all types of exposed components of such electrical wall assemblies.

It is an object of this invention to provide a universal paint shield which is releasably attachable over and protectively covering virtually all sizes and configurations of electrical wall outlets and switch assemblies during wall painting operations.

It is another object of this invention to provide a unique forced biasing arrangement for the releasable attachment of a universal paint shield onto the cover plate of electrical wall outlet and switch assemblies to protect those assemblies from unintended paint splatter while painting the interior walls of a room.

Still another object of this invention is to provide a reusable universal paint shield in various standard sizes, each standard size being adapted to be protectively attachable to virtually any configuration of electrical wall outlet or switch assembly having that standard size perimeter.

In accordance with these and other objects which will become apparent hereinafter, the instant invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING(S)

Figure 1 is an exploded perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the invention shown being attachable to either a standard single width electrical wall switch assembly or an electrical wall outlet assembly.

Figure 2 is a rear elevation view of the interior or rearwardly facing side of the invention shown in Figure 1.

Figure 3 is a section view in the direction of arrows 3-3 in Figure 2.

Figure 4 is a section view in the direction of arrows 4-4 in Figure 2.

Figure 5 is an enlarged view of area 5 in Figure 3.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring now to the drawings, the preferred embodiment of the invention is there shown generally at numeral **10** and includes a molded plastic body **12** formed as a single unit of uniform thickness of about .05" - .06" and having a generally rectangular front panel **14** having a front or obverse surface and a rearward or reverse surface and opposing top and bottom walls **18** and opposing side walls **16** projecting rearwardly from the front panel **14**. These top and bottom walls **18** and side walls **16** have continuous

outer edge portions **16a** and **18a** which define the open reverse surface of the molded body **12**.

The front panel **14** includes a preferably flat central portion **22** which is forwardly offset about 0.7" from the front panel **14** by tapered central wall portions **24** and **26**. A central clearance cavity **28** having dimension of about 1.9" in width and 3.0" in length is thus defined which is adapted in interior volume and dimension to provide adequate clearance for exposed switch components such as the switch **T** which are a part of an electrical switch assembly **A** and associated cover plate **G** as best seen in Figures 1 and 3.

By this arrangement, the universal paint shield **10** is protectively attachable onto the outer edge surfaces of cover plates **G** or **H** of virtually any standard sized electrical switch or outlet assembly **A** or **C**, respectively. The front panel **14**, being offset about 0.3" from the outer edge portions **18d** and **16a** of the top and bottom walls **18** and side walls **16**, respectively, generally provide adequate clearance or spacing from the wall surface onto which an outlet assembly **A** is installed. This is also true with respect to the cover plate **D** of the wall outlet **C**. The clearance cavity **28** provides adequate clearance for any known exposed switch **T** or other toggle or slider component associated with virtually any electrical switch assembly.

The universal paint shield **10** is biasingly attachable onto any standard sized cover plate such as **G** and **H** by the resilient biased gripping of the very outer edge surfaces **B** and **D** of the cover plates **G** and **H**. In general, the inner dimensions (4.52" and 2.78") of the outer edge portions **18a** and **16a** of the top and bottom walls **18** and the side walls **16**, respectively, exactly match those of the corresponding standard cover plate **B** or **D** of

electrical switch or outlet assembly **A** or **C**, respectively. However, as best seen in Figures 2 and 5, the outer edge portions **16a** of the side walls **16** are arcuately inwardly contoured a distance **30** of about 0.03" from a perfectly straight edge shown in phantom for reference. Likewise, the top and bottom margins **18** are also arcuately inwardly formed and are displaced a distance **32** of about 0.30" from a true straight margin which is also shown in phantom for reference. These offset distances **30** and **32** of the corresponding outer edge portions **16a** and **18a** of the side walls **16** and top and bottom walls **18** are preferably in the range of 1/32". That is to say that, for example, the nominal width of a standard sized cover plate is 2.78" while the length is 4.52". The inner dimensions of the molded body **12** will be nominally equal to these width and length dimensions. However, each of the mid portions of the outer edge portions **16a** and **18a** will be displaced or curved arcuately inward as shown in Figure 2 to a nominal width dimension of about 2.72" and a nominal length dimension of 4.47".

This inward contouring of the otherwise straight outer edge portions **16a** and **18a** at the central areas thereof requires that the universal paint shield **10** be thus forcibly urged into deployed biased engagement over the outer edge surface **B** or **D** of cover plates **A** and **C**, respectively to effect the only attachment means of the paint shield **10** over the cover plates **B** or **D**.

Note that the outer edge portions **18a** and **16a** of the top and bottom walls **18** and side walls **16**, respectively, are somewhat thinner reduced in thickness from a nominal thickness of the molded body **12** of approximately .05 - .06" down to a thickness of approximately 0.02". This thinning of the top and bottom walls **18** and side walls **16** as best seen in Figure 5 cooperates with the inwardly arcuate profile of the edge portions

16a and **18a** to produce the inward biasing force against the outer edge surfaces **B** and **D** of cover plates **A** and **C** to retain the device **10** in position during normal painting operations. The side walls **16** and **18** flex outwardly in the direction of arrow **F** in Figure 5 to create this biased holding force.

By this arrangement, the only retaining force provided or required by the present invention is produced by the resilient flexing of the top and/or bottom walls **18** and side walls **16** aided by the arcuate inward configurations at **30** and **32** in Figure 2 of these top, bottom and side walls requiring forcible urging of the device **10** over the cover plate **A** and **C** and around the outer edge surfaces **B** and **D**.

It is noted that a total of only three size variations of this invention, coupled with the corresponding offset central portion of the front panel of each of these size embodiments are required to protectively deal with virtually all standard sizes of electrical switch and outlet assemblies typically encountered in the painting of the interior walls of a room of a home or building. These electrical switch and outlet size variations are due to the utilization of double and triple electrical outlet and switch assemblies which are ganged together and incorporating a multi-apertured cover plate (not shown).

As seen in Figure 1, a textured or ribbed gripping band **34** is formed along the length of the outer surfaces of opposing side portions **24** of the clearance cavity for enhanced finger gripability of the paint shield during its deployment and particularly removal after painting operations are completed.

While the instant invention has been shown and described herein in what are conceived to be the most practical and preferred embodiments, it is recognized that departures may be made therefrom within the scope of the invention, which is therefore

not to be limited to the details disclosed herein, but is to be afforded the full scope of the claims so as to embrace any and all equivalent apparatus and articles.